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**IRAQ**

**PRIMARY HEALTH  
CARE PROJECT**

## TECHNICAL BRIEF

# STRENGTHENED PRENATAL CARE THROUGH BCC, GUIDELINES AND EDUCATION



Photo: USAID / PHCPI

*Women health awareness meeting in  
Al-Refaey MC in Dhi-Qar*

### Background

Prenatal care is health care mothers receive during the course of a pregnancy to prevent potential health problems, while promoting healthy lifestyles that benefit both mother and child.

In Iraq, efforts are currently being made to strengthen the delivery and availability of prenatal care with the goal of limiting complications during pregnancy. Complementing these efforts is a communications campaign highlighting the importance of pregnant women to seek high-quality prenatal care from skilled health care providers.

Prenatal care provides opportunities for behavioral changes to take effect that support the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 4 & 5, which seek to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health. The USAID-funded Primary Health Care Project in Iraq (PHCPI) has worked closely with the Ministry of Health (MoH) to develop and disseminate guidelines on prenatal care and women's health to help build public awareness, particularly targeting women of lower socioeconomic status including Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) caused by recent political instability.

### PHCPI Prenatal Care Activities

In partnership with the Iraqi Ministry of Health, USAID/PHCPI has helped to strengthen prenatal care through the following activities:

- Guidelines on prenatal care were developed and disseminated to Primary Health Care (PHC) clinics across Iraq.
- A Behavior Change Communication (BCC) Campaign was developed and launched with messages emphasizing the importance of early and complete prenatal care, preparations for a safe delivery, benefits of breast feeding and neonatal care. Along with print materials disseminated to PHC clinics, this campaign was also broadcast on national television and radio stations.
- Health providers, volunteers and Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) were trained on the importance of prenatal care and maternal nutrition.
- Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials on health

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**August 2014**

The USAID Primary Health Care Project in Iraq (PHCPI) is funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under Contract No. AID-267-C-0-11-00004. The project team includes prime recipient, URC, and sub-recipient organizations Management Sciences International and Sallyport Holdings, Inc.



USAID/PHCPI prenatal care materials

care during pregnancy were distributed to PHC clinics, including posters designed to reach illiterate mothers.

- Conducted awareness workshops at PHC clinics and within the catchment areas of PHCPI-targeted clinics reaching women of reproductive age on nutrition, women's health and prenatal care.
- Made recommendations to strengthen the MoH's mortality reporting system to improve its accuracy and reliability to better assess the impact of the Ministry's interventions to identify and help reduce the causes of maternal deaths in Iraq.

### PHCPI Support Leads to Increased Utilization and Improved Health Outcomes

PHCPI activities focused on prenatal care have resulted in:

- Study on Maternal Mortality completed with recommendations on improving reporting.
- Over 53 training-of-trainers sessions, with 33 rollout training courses, and 14 refresher training courses were delivered on prenatal care in PHC clinics.
- Over 557 health care staff trained on pre-marital counseling in 214 PHC clinics across Iraq.
- Over 745 health care staff trained on prenatal care in 224 PHC clinics through rollout and refresher courses across Iraq.
- Over 723 members of non-governmental organizations and Local Health Committees trained on prenatal awareness through 29 training sessions.
- Increased knowledge among traditionally underserved women about available health care services, especially reproductive health.
- Increased awareness of women on the importance of pre-conception health, birth spacing and prenatal care.
- Increased awareness among pregnant women about options for receiving high-quality delivery services.

Due to PHCPI interventions and support to the MoH, PHCCs across the country are seeing:

- An increased number of referrals by TBAs of women with high-risk pregnancies for hospital delivery.
- An increase in access to safe delivery practices through improved TBA skills, equipment and practices.
- An increased number of women scheduling at least four prenatal care visits.
- Increased early clinic-level detection of high-risk pregnancies resulting in increased utilization of emergency obstetrical care services by mothers.
- An increased proportion of women seeking postnatal care.

Increased utilization of health services is a large step towards improved maternal and child health. While improved care is an important aspect of health outcomes, awareness of and confidence in the available care will lead to higher utilization rates and the establishment of better health practices. The increasing number of women accessing prenatal care is indicative of PHCPI's impact and contributions towards improved maternal and child health and the MoH's commitment to continue PHCPI-established interventions will help to ensure Iraq's achievement of MDGs 4 & 5.